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ABSTRACT

Male and female subjects judged an essay purportedly written by an attractive or an unattractive female author. The attractive author was rated as significantly more talented by male judges. Female judges rated the attractive author less talented although this difference was not statistically significant. A second experiment concerned ratings by males and females of essays written by attractive or unattractive male authors. The results suggested that the attractiveness halo effect does not occur for male authors. (Author)

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# IS BEAUTY TALENT?

## SEX INTERACTION IN THE ATTRACTIVENESS HALO EFFECT

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Do physically attractive people have unfair advantages? An accumulation of contemporary research suggests that they do (Berschied & Walster, 1972). Of particular interest is a set of experiments suggesting that attractive people receive superior evaluations for behavior comparable to that contributed by less attractive individuals (Clifford & Walster, 1973; Landy & Sigall, 1974). These results are discouraging because they imply discrimination in the evaluation of school and job performance(Berschied & Walster, 1972; Dipbaze, Fromkin, & Wilback, 1975) as well as judgements concerning moral or legal transgressions (Dion, 1972; Sigall & Ostrove, 1975.

Since this research suggests unfair treatment of people, it is important to examine in detail reports concerning this bias. The most often cited experiment on an attractiveness induced halo effect was reported by Landy and Sigall (1974). These investigators asked college men to evaluate either well written or poorly written essays. Attached to the essays were pictures of their supposed female authors. The pictures showed either an attractive woman, an unattractive woman, or the picture was omitted. Essays attributed to more attractive authors were rated as higher in quality and the authors of these essays were seen as more talented. This bias was shown to be more potent when the essays were of low caliber. In this paper, we will refer to this phenomena as the attractiveness halo effect.

There are two important difficulties with the Landy and Sigall experiment: one substantive, and one methodological. The substantive problem is that the data only represent males rating females. There is, however, an increasing amount of evidence that people discriminate against the most attractive



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members of their own sex. Krebs and Adinolfi (1975), for example, found that the most attractive members of each sex were rejected most by their same sex dorm-mates. Dermer and Thiel (1975) had female subjects make attributions about other females who varied in physical attractiveness. They found that women attribute a variety of socially undesirable characteristics to more attractive members of their own gender. These results suggest that the halo effect reported by Landy and sigall may not occur if females rather than males judged the work of female authors. The present experiment included both male and female students as judges of the work attributed to attractive and unattractive women. If women could be found to show less interpersonal bias than men, the argument that women should only be evaluated by other women could be supported.

Since the present experiment was, in part, a replication of the Landy and Sigall research, it was important not to repeat a methodological error in the prior research. Landy and Sigall used several dependant variables which they report (in a footnote) to be highly intercorrelated. Their analysis included: 1) a series of comparisons by univariate analysis of variance performed for different dependant variables, and 2) analysis of variance tests using composites as dependant variables. The composites were formed by summing over several of the correlated but heterogenous measures. Given the nature of their data, both of these approaches are inappropriate. A more useful method of analysis would have involved Multivariate Analysis of Vaiance (MANOVA).

The omission of multivariate methods in social psychological research is unfortunate because several sources of benefit can be derived from the use

of such techniques. Problems of interpretation are likely to arise when composites are formed by summing heterogeneous items.

The use of a composite index may mask effects which operate differently on several response domains. Because of this problem, most investigators have gone toward the separation of composite indices into discrete components which are analyzed through a series of univariate comparisons. When a series of univariate comparisons are employed, the differences between groups are likely to be magnified since dependent variables are often intercorrelated. In addition, the intercorrelations of dependent variables often make it difficult to interpret the meaning of such group differences. The multivariate comparison of group centroids permits maintenance of an alpha level which is not increased by the addition of more dependent variables. Thus, one form of benefit from the use of multivariate techniques is a more accurate assessment of group differences (Kaplan & Goldman, 1973).

In the first experiment male and female judges evaluated essays attributed to physically attractive or unattractive female authors. The data were analyzed using multivariate methods. It is predicted that the biasing effect of physical attractiveness will occur for male, but not for female judges.

## Experiment 1

### Method

Subjects. The subjects were 70 male and 70 female undergraduate students at a large public university. The students volunteered for the experiment in order to meet a requirement for their introductory psychology course.

Design. The task for the subjects was to read a short essay and give their impressions of the essay and its author. Attached to each essay was a picture of its purported author. Actually the essay was the same in all cases and the

picture was used to manipulate the physical attractiveness of the author. Half of the male and half of the female subjects read an essay attributed to a physically attractive female author; the other half of the subjects saw an essay attribted to a physically unattractive female author. Thus, the design for the experiment was a 2 X 2 factorial with two levels of subject sex (male and female) and two levels of author physical attractiveness (attractive and unattractive).

Cover story. A bogus letter from a ficticious professor of journalism at another university explained the purported purpose of the experiment. The letter explained that the experiment was about social judgment and that the subject would be asked to read and judge one of a number of essays that were submitted in a freshman English class. The essays had purportedly been solicited by the instructor of the English class by a local television station. As required by the contest rules, each essay was turned in along with a description of the author and a picture. The letter also requested the subject to give his frank and honest evaluation of the essay and its author on a judgment form. In order to make the task more motivating, the subjects were told that their reactions would be compared to those of the professional judges of the contest. The story was designed to be similar to the one used by Landy and Sigall (1974).

Essay. Since Landy and Sigall (1974) had shown that the biasing effect of physical appearance was more potent when the essay was of low quality, it was deemed important to find an essay of fairly low quality. On the other hand, we feared that an essay of exceptionally low quality would make the purpose of the experiment more transparent. Therefore, it was necessary to find an essay which was of low enough quality to produce the effect of attractiveness

yet good enough to be believable.

Several essays were generated and a consensus among a group of graduate students was reached on the appropriateness of an essay entitled "Our Lady of the Bicentennial." The essay was about patriotism, the bicentennial, and the Statue of Liberty. It began:

> In spite of the wind-driven rain and choppy waves that beat against the ship the passengers crowded onto the deck. They strained their eyes to see their first glimpse of light. There it was, surrounded by rain and wind, the torch of the Statue of Liberty. Where is this same enthusiasm today, the year of our Bicentennial?

The entire essay was less than 250 words and was designed to emulate the style of an untalented college freshman.

It is important to point out that the effect reported by Landy and Sigall was most apparent for essays of low quality. Their data did not suggest that the attractiveness halo effect occurs for essays of high quality. Therefore, high quality essays were not included in the present study.

Author Attractiveness. A professional photographer provided an accumulation of facial photographs. The photographs were shown to a group of nine (7 male and 2 female) advanced psychology students. The students who were aware of the purpose of the experiment rated the pictures for attractiveness on a 10 point rating scale. The pictures with the highest and the lowest mean ratings were chosen.

The pictures were mounted on copies of the essay along with a description of the author which read:

About the Author-

Mary Fisher is a freshman at Cal State Northridge who has yet to decide upon a major field of study. She was born and raised in the San Fernando Valley. Mary's father is a businessman and her mother is a housewife. She has one brother and one sister and her hobbies include tennis and reading.

Dependent variables. Following the Landy and Sigall method, the essay was rated on four ninepoint scales: 1) creativity (with polls low and high), 2) ideas (dull - interesting), 3) style (poor - good), and 4) general quality (poor - good). In addition, each subject rated the author on four nine point scales representing the characteristics: 1) intelligence, 2) sensitivity, 3) talent, and 4) overall ability. The end anchors for each of these scales were low and high.

Results

The average within group correlations of all dependent variables are presented in Table 1. Notice that the correlations among variables are quite high. Landy and Sigall (1974) created composite variables by summing scores across several dependent measures. For instance, they summed scores for creativity, ideas, and style to form one composite; and added scores for intelligence, sensitivity and talent to form another composite. Since the component variables in these composites are highly correlated, the summations are likely to magnify differences between groups.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Table 2 presents the means for all variables and summarizes univariate

and multivariate analyses for these data. Examination of Table 2 suggests that female respondents tended to evaluate the essay more favorably than did male subjects (significant univariate effects were observed for ratings of creativity, intelligence, talent, and overall ability).

There were few main effects associated with attractiveness of the bogus author. Analysis of variance demonstrated that the attractive woman was rated as being more sensitive and to possess more ability.

The most impressive findings were for the interactions between sex of subject and attractiveness of the bogus author. Univariate ANOVA revealed that this interaction was pronounced for several scales. In most cases, simple effects tests demonstrated that males rated the essay more favorably when the author was attractive than when she was unattractive; female judges tended not to be significantly affected by the attractiveness of a female author. An example of this interaction is shown graphically in Figure 1. The figure is based upon rating for talent, which was the variable for which the interaction was strongest, $\underline{F}$ (1, 36) = 10.72, $\underline{p} < .001$.

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Insert Table 2 and Figure 1 about here

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Since the dependent variables were highly correlated it is important to focus upon analyses which take these correlations into consideration. Discriminant function analysis was used for this purpose. For this analysis, the groups were arranged in a 1 X 4 design. The analysis revealed that the significant differences between groups could be accounted for by a single discriminant root of $W^{-1}$ A (where $W^{-1}$ = the sums of squares and cross products (SSCP) matrix, and A is the between groups SSCP matrix). The chi

square value was significant ($x^2$ = 24.82, df = 9, $p < .003$) for this first discriminant function and nonsignificant for the remaining two functions.

The meaning of the discriminant function is defined by the loadings of variables upon it. Employing Rao's generalized distance measure (Rao, 1952), variables were entered into the equation in a specific order. This method selects the variable which contributes most to group separation and enters it first. The sequence in which other variables are entered into the analysis depends upon the degree to which they contribute to group differences. Variables which do not significantly contribute to group differences do not become included in the analysis. The loadings of the variables are shown in the final column in Table 2. Inspection of the loadings (or discriminant functions coefficients) suggests that group differences are defined largely by ratings for talent, and to a lesser extent by style and sensitivity. Coefficients are not reported for five of the variables because these measures did not contribute significantly to the group differences. In most cases, this is because the information provided by these measures is already represented in the variables for which coefficients are reported.

## Experiment 2

The findings of the first experiment suggest that there may be limitations to the attractiveness halo effect. Although Landy and Sigall's (1974) data were replicated, the halo effect did not generalize when women were used as judges. It has been suggested, that both men and women allow physical attractiveness to influence their judgments (Byrne, London, & Reeves, 1968; Dion, Berschied, & Walster, 1972; Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1966). One explanation for the absence of a halo effect among women judges is that the bias is limited to the judgment of opposite sex individuals.

Women may not be influenced by the attractiveness of other women, but they may be effected by the attractiveness of men.

Experiment 2 replicated the first experiment in every detail except the sex of the supposed authors of the essays. When the authors of the essays were attractive and unattractive men, it was predicted that the halo effect would occur for female but not for male judges.

## Method

Subjects. The subjects were 60 male and 60 female students who had volunteered in order to meet a requirement for their introductory psychology course. The subjects were from the same general pool as those in Experiment 1. No subject was in both experiments.

Design and procedure. The design and execution of Experiment 2 was identical to that in Experiment 1 with one exception. The only difference was that the pictures attached to the essay were of either attractive or unattractive males.[1] The description of the essay author as Mary Fisher was modified to describe John Fisher. Every other aspect of the procedure was as it had been in Experiment 1.

## Results

Multivariate analysis of variance revealed that neither sex of subject, attractiveness of author, nor their interaction had significant effects upon judgments of the essay and its author, each multivariate $F < 1.0$. These findings suggest that the benefits of being an attractive female may not generalize to attractive males.

## Discussion

The results of the present experiments suggest that the attractiveness halo effect may be more limited than has formerly been believed. The data

from Experiment 1 suggest that the findings of Landy and Sigall are replicable, but that they are specific to male judges. Indeed, our data are consistent with the findings of Krebs and Adinalfi (1975) who argue that women are not positively influenced by the attractiveness of other women. The data from Experiment 2 indicate that male and female judges are uninfluenced by physical attractiveness when evaluating essays attrabuted to male authors. In sum, the attractiveness halo effect is specific to the situation in which men judge the low quality work of women.

These results have practical significance. In most situations the work of women is evaluated by men. In comparison to male evaluators, females are less likely to be biased by external factors when evaluating other women. In addition, female judges tend to give more favorable evaluations in general. Thus, women should demand that their work be evaluated by other women because women evaluators are more favorable and less biased.

It is important to point out that the attractiveness halo effect does not occur when high quality work is being judged. In conjunction with Landy and Sigall, our results suggest that "beauty is talent" but only when a "beauty" has produced low quality work and her talent is judged by men.

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Footnotes

[1]It should be noted that selecting pictures for males was considerably more difficult than it had been for females. A group of five men and five women advanced psychology students required several sessions and over 40 photographs in order to come to a consensus. The variances of ratings for male pictures was more than 30 percent larger than it had been for ratings women.

Table 1

Within Groups Correlations between Dependant Variables

| | Creativity | Ideas | Style | Quality | Intelligence | Sensitivity | Talent | Ability |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Creativity | 1.00 | | | | | | | |
| Ideas | .67 | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| Style | .67 | .48 | 1.00 | | | | | |
| Quality | .74 | .73 | .71 | 1.00 | | | | |
| Intelligence | .64 | .58 | .55 | .68 | 1.00 | | | |
| Sensitivity | .36 | .39 | .47 | .47 | .44 | 1.00 | | |
| Talent | .63 | .55 | .64 | .68 | .66 | .46 | 1.00 | |
| Ability | .67 | .59 | .61 | .72 | .72 | .48 | .83 | 1.00 |

Table 2

Summary of Data Analysis

| Variable | MEANS | | | | Univariate F's[1] (df = 1/136) | | | SDFC[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Sex of Subject: | Male | Male | Female | Female | A. Sex of | B. Author | A X B | |
| Essay | Author: | Unattractive | Attractive | Unattractive | Attractive | Subject | Attractive | | |
| Creativity | | 4.80 | 5.60 | 5.88 | 5.65 | 3.64 | .91 | 2.95 | NS |
| Ideas | | 4.51 | 5.71 | 5.71 | 5.68 | 3.42 | 3.42 | 3.77 | NS |
| Style | | 5.05 | 5.86 | 5.86 | 5.42 | .27 | .27 | 2.97 | -.24 |
| Overall Quality | | 4.94 | 5.91 | 6.11 | 5.71 | 2.58 | .89 | 5.14* | NS |
| Author | | | | | | | | | |
| Intelligence | | 5.48 | 6.37 | 6.63 | 6.17 | 3.60* | .74 | 7.29** | NS |
| Sensitivity | | 6.20 | 7.02 | 6.71 | 7.17 | 1.65 | 6.33* | .52 | .14 |
| Talent | | 4.86 | 6.20 | 6.26 | 5.88 | 4.30* | 3.44 | 10.72** | .61 |
| Ability | | 5.40 | 6.51 | 6.43 | 6.37 | 3.54 | 5.04* | 6.19* | NS |

1 * $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

2 SDFC - Standard Discriminant Function Coefficient
Ns is used to indicate that the partial F did not contribute significantly to the discriminant function.